

Animals in Kansas Schools: Guidelines for Visiting and Resident Pets

Introduction	1
Animals that are Unacceptable for School Visits	1
Special Conditions for Specific Animals	2
Suggested Animals for Use in Schools	3
General Guidelines for Animals that are Permitted to Visit Schools	3
Proper Restraint of Animals	4
Student Contact with Animals	4
Handling and Disposal of Animal Wastes While on Student Campuses	5
Humane Treatment	5
Conclusion	5
Further Information	5
Appendix:	
National Science Teachers Association Guidelines for Responsible Use of Animals in the Classroom	6
National Association of Biology Teachers Position Statement: The Use of Animals in Biology Education	7
Handwashing Instructions	8

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Introduction

The purpose of these guidelines is to provide information to promote safety for instructors and students when animals are brought into the classroom. Animals are part of our daily lives; they can be used effectively as part of our daily lives; they can be used effectively as teaching aids, and the positive benefits of the human-animal bond are well established. However, the special situation of classrooms necessitates certain safeguards.

Inadequate understanding of animal disease and behavior can lead to unnecessary risks for children and animals alike. These guidelines are designed to promote a better understanding of:

1. Which animals may represent a health hazard and are not safe to bring in classrooms at all;
2. Health considerations when handling animals which have the potential to transmit disease;
3. Safety precautions for introducing animals into classrooms;
4. How to properly handle animal wastes to limit the spread of disease from animals to humans.

Regulations concerning animals in licensed day care facilities are found in K.A.R. 28-4-131.

Animals that are Unacceptable for School Visits

1. Wild animals

Defining a “wild” animal is difficult and subjective. For the purposes of these guidelines, a wild animal is any *mammal* that is **NOT** one of the following:

- a. Domestic dog
- b. Domestic cat
- c. Domestic ferret
- d. Domestic ungulate (e.g., cow, sheep, goat, pig, horse)
- e. Pet rabbit
- f. Pet rodent (e.g., mice, rats, hamsters, gerbils, guinea pigs, chinchillas)

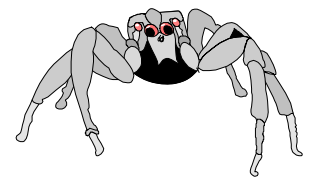
Wild animals pose a risk for transmitting rabies as well as other *zoonotic diseases* (i.e., diseases which can be transferred from animals to humans) and should never be brought into schools or handled by children. In Kansas it is unlawful to possess skunks, foxes, raccoons, and coyotes as pets (K.A.R. 28-1-14).

Wild animals' behavior also tends to be unpredictable. A wild animal that has been raised in captivity is still a wild animal. Domestication takes thousands of years, not just a generation or two.

Exceptions to this recommendation include those instances when the wild animals are presented at schools by a professional who has experience handling wildlife, and are displayed in enclosed cages which prevent contact between the animal and children. *Because of the high incidence of rabies in bats, raccoons, skunks, and wild carnivores, these animals (including recently dead animals) should not be permitted on school grounds under any circumstances.*

2. Poisonous animals

Spiders, venomous insects, poisonous reptiles (including snakes), and poisonous amphibians should be prohibited from being brought onto school grounds. Exceptions to this recommendation include those instances when these animals are presented at schools by a professional who has experience handling them, and are displayed in cases which provide a physical barrier between the animal and the children (e.g., animal is enclosed behind a sturdy glass or plastic).



3. Wolf-dog hybrids

These animals are crosses between a wolf and a domestic dog and have shown a propensity for aggression, especially toward young children. Therefore, they should not be allowed on school grounds.

4. Stray animals

Stray animals should never be brought onto school grounds because the health and vaccination status of these animals is unknown.

5. Baby chicks and ducks

Because of the high risk of salmonellosis and campylobacteriosis from these animals, they are inappropriate in schools. Transmission of these diseases from chicks and ducklings to children is well documented in the medical literature.

6. Aggressive animals

Animals which are bred or trained to demonstrate aggression towards humans or other animals, or animals which have demonstrated such aggressive behavior in the past, should not be permitted on school campuses. Aggressive, unprovoked, or threatening behavior should mandate the animal's immediate removal.

Exceptions may be sentry or canine corps dogs for demonstration that are under the control of trained military or law enforcement officials.

Special Conditions for Specific Animals

Specific recommendations should be observed for the following animals because of their zoonotic diseases that they may carry or because of certain tendencies:

1. Reptiles (including non-poisonous snakes, lizards, and iguanas) and amphibians

Because of the risk of contracting salmonellosis from these animals even when they are reared in captivity, special precautions are necessary when handling them. These animals may intermittently shed salmonella, and negative cultures will not guarantee that the animals are not infected. Treatment of infected animals with antibiotics has not proven useful and may promote the development and spread of resistant bacteria.

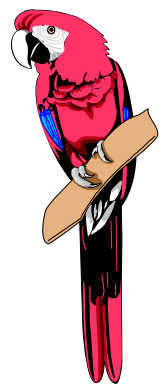
It is recommended that when reptiles and amphibians are present at schools they should be under the direct responsibility of professionals

(including teachers) who have training and experience handling them. The animals should be kept and displayed in cases which provide a physical barrier between the animal and the children (e.g., sturdy glass or plastic).

Because Salmonellosis can be more severe in young children and because their hygiene practices are more questionable, handling of reptiles and amphibians is not recommended for children younger than 12 years. **Any time children are allowed to handle these animals, they should receive very clear instructions on how to wash their hands thoroughly after they finish.** Handwashing instructions are in the appendix.

2. Psittacine birds

Because psittacine birds can carry zoonotic diseases such as psittacosis (Chlamydia psittaci, parrot fever), such birds (parrots, parakeets, budgies, and cockatiels) should not be handled by children. Birds showing any signs of illness should not be brought into school. Psittacine birds may be brought to school as long as their cages are clean and the bird's wastes can be contained, such as within a cage. Psittacine birds permanently housed on school property in cages should be treated prophylactically with appropriate tetracyclines for psittacosis for 45 days prior to entering the premises.



3. Ferrets

Ferrets can be allowed to visit school classrooms, but they must be handled by the person responsible for them. Because of their propensity to bite when startled, it is not recommended that school children hold ferrets visiting the classroom.

4. Fish

Disposable gloves should be worn when cleaning aquariums. Used tank water should be disposed of in sinks that are not used for food preparation, or for obtaining water for human consumption.

5. Guide, hearing, and other service animals and law enforcement animals

These animals should not be prohibited from being on school grounds or in classrooms.



Suggested Animals for Use in Schools

The following is a list of animals that are appropriate pets to be housed in schools:

1. Small pet rodents (e.g., mice, rats, hamsters, gerbils, guinea pigs, chinchillas)
2. Pet rabbits
3. Aquarium fish (salt or fresh water)
4. Non-psittacine cage and aviary birds (e.g., canaries, finches, mynahs, diamond doves)

All animals housed in schools should be provided an appropriate environment (e.g., secure housing, suitable temperature, adequate exercise) and a proper diet. In addition, there should be a plan for the continued care of these animals during the days that school is not in session. Consultation with a veterinarian is advised to help with environmental and nutritional needs and provide care in the event of illness or injury to the animal.

General Guidelines for Animals that are Permitted to Visit Schools

It is important that animals that are brought onto school campuses be clean and healthy so that the risk of transmitting diseases is minimal. Children tend to be more susceptible to zoonotic diseases and parasitic infections than adults also because of their lack of handwashing and greater propensity for putting hands in their mouths. Therefore, animals which are brought to school should be clean and free of disease and external parasites such as fleas, ticks and mites, to decrease the likelihood of the animal transmitting these agents or vectors to the students. Visiting animals should be restricted to an area designated by the principal or administrator. Kittens and puppies are appropriate only for short classroom visits.

The following are specific recommendations for some common visiting animals:

1. Verified rabies vaccination

Current rabies vaccination by a licensed veterinarian should be documented for all dogs, cats, and ferrets brought onto the school campus for instructional purposes. Dogs and cats under three months of age or not vaccinated against rabies should not be handled by children.

2. Health certificates for dogs

A health certificate signed by a licensed veterinarian showing proof of current vaccination against canine distemper, canine hepatitis, leptospirosis, parainfluenza, bordatella, and rabies should be available. Animals must have had a negative fecal exam or proof of successful treatment for internal parasites in the past year. The animal should be free of external parasites such as fleas, ticks, and mites and free of obvious skin lesions. Dogs over four months of age should be housebroken.

3. Health certificate for cats

A health certificate which is signed by a licensed veterinarian showing proof of current vaccination against feline panleukopenia (feline distemper), rhinotracheitis, calcivirus, chlamydia, feline leukemia, and rabies should be available. Animals must have had a negative fecal exam or proof of successful treatment for internal parasites in the past year. The animal should be free of external parasites such as fleas, ticks, and mites and free of obvious skin lesions.

4. Health certificates for ferrets

A health certificate which is signed by a licensed veterinarian showing proof of current vaccination against canine distemper and rabies should be available. Animals must have had a negative fecal exam or proof of successful treatment for internal parasites in the past year. The animal should be free of external parasites such as fleas, ticks, and mites and be free of obvious skin lesions.

Proper Restraint of Animals

Because animals may react strangely to classroom situations, it is important to have an effective way to control them. Fear may cause an animal to attempt to escape or even act aggressively in situations which are unusual to them (the “flight or fight” phenomenon). Appropriate restraint devices will allow the holder to react quickly and prevent harm to students or escape of the animal.

1. Collars and leashes

Dogs, cats, and ferrets should be wearing a proper collar, harness, and/or leash when on the school campus or in the classroom so they can be easily controlled. Household rope or string is not an appropriate restraint tool. The owner or responsible person should stay with the animal during its visit to the school. No animal should be allowed to roam unrestrained on the school campus or in the classroom.

2. Pet birds

Pet birds should never be allowed to fly free in a classroom.

3. Designated areas

All animals should be restricted to the area designated by the principal or administrator. In school facilities in which the common dining area is also used as an auditorium, gymnasium, or multi-purpose room animals may be allowed in the area **at times other than meals if:**

- effective partitioning or self-closing doors separate the area from food storage and food preparation areas;
- condiments, equipment, and utensils are stored in enclosed cabinets or removed from the area when animals are present; and
- dining areas, including tables, countertops, and similar surfaces are effectively cleaned before the next meal service. Cleaning should be done with a 10% bleach solution or commercial disinfectant.

Animals should **not** be in dining areas during mealtimes.

4. Estrus

Female dogs and cats should be determined not to be in estrus (heat) at the time of the visit.

Student Contact with Animals

Increased activity and sudden movements can make animals feel threatened, so all student contact with animals should always be supervised and conform to a few basic rules. Even very tame animals may act aggressively in strange situations.

- Animal bites can usually be avoided if students are kept in small groups.
- Rough play or teasing should absolutely not be allowed.
- Children should not be allowed to feed pets directly from their hands.
- Small animals such as rabbits, hamsters, gerbils, and mice should be handled very gently.

Rabbits rarely like to be held and will struggle to free themselves.

Rodents may bite when they feel threatened, but rabies post-exposure prophylaxis is almost never warranted with small rodent bites.

- Children should be discouraged from “kissing” animals or having them in close contact with their faces.



- Education with animals should be used to re-emphasize proper hygiene and handwashing recommendations. All children who handle animals should be instructed to wash their hands immediately after handling them.
- Animals should not be allowed in the vicinity of sinks where children wash their hands, or in any areas where food is prepared, stored, or served. Animals should not be kept in areas used for cleaning or storage of food utensils or dishes. Animals should also be restricted from nursing stations or sterile and clean supply rooms.

8. Do not allow cats or dogs in sandboxes where children play.
9. Immunocompromised students (e.g., children with organ transplants, children currently receiving cancer chemotherapy or radiation therapy) may be especially susceptible to zoonotic diseases; therefore, special precautions may be needed to minimize the risk of disease transmission to these students. Consultation with the child's parents about precautionary measures is strongly advised.

10. In the event of an animal bite, contact the local health department for guidance.

Recommendations for specific precautionary measures may also be solicited from the Kansas Department of Health and Environment, Office of Epidemiologic Services (785-296-2951).

Handling and Disposal of Animal Wastes While on School Campuses

1. Clean up of animal wastes. Children should not handle or clean up any form of animal waste (feces, urine, blood, etc.). Animal wastes should be disposed of where children cannot come into contact with them, such as in a plastic bag or container with a well-fitted lid or via the sewage waste system for feces. Food handlers should not be involved in the clean-up of animal wastes.

2. Prohibited areas. Animal wastes should not be disposed of and visiting animals should not be allowed to defecate in or near areas where children routinely play or congregate (e.g., sandboxes, school playgrounds).

3. Litter boxes. Litter boxes for visiting animals should not be allowed in classrooms.

Humane Treatment

To avoid the intentional or unintentional abuse, mistreatment, or neglect of animals, the humane care and husbandry recommendations of the National Association of Biology Teachers and the National Science Teachers Association should be adopted (See Appendix).

Conclusion

Animals can serve as excellent teaching tools, and students love to have them visit the classroom. When using animals as an instructional aid, the objective should always be well planned in advance. By following the above recommendations, the use of animals in the classroom can be made safe and enjoyable for both the animals and the children.



Further Information

For further information, please contact the Kansas Department of Health and Environment, Office of Epidemiologic Services, 1000 SW Jackson, Suite 210, Topeka, KS 66612-1274; phone (785) 296-2951; fax (785) 291-3775.

National Science Teachers Association Guidelines for Responsible Use of Animals in the Classroom

These guidelines are recommended by the National Science Teachers Association for use by science educators and students. It applies, in particular, to the use of non-human animals in instructional activities planned and/or supervised by teachers who teach science at the pre-college level.

Observation and experimentation with living organisms give students unique perspectives of life processes that are not provided by other modes of instruction. Studying animals in the classroom enables students to develop skills of observation and comparison, a sense of stewardship, and an appreciation for the unity, inter-relationships, and complexity of life. This study, however, requires appropriate humane care of the organism. Teachers are expected to be knowledgeable about the proper care of organisms under study and the safety of their students.

These are the guidelines recommended by NSTA concerning the responsible use of animals in a school classroom/laboratory:

- # Acquisition and care of animals must be appropriate to the species.
- # Student classwork and science projects involving animals must be under the supervision of a science teacher or other trained professional.
- # Teachers sponsoring or supervising the use of animals in instructional activities including acquisition, care, and disposition, will adhere to local, state, and national laws, policies and regulations regarding species of organisms.

- # Teachers must instruct students on safety precautions for handling live animals or animal specimens.
- # Plans for the future care or disposition of animals at the conclusion of a study must be developed and implemented.
- # Laboratory and dissection activities must be conducted with consideration/appreciation for the organism. Laboratory and dissection activities must be conducted in a clean and organized work space with care and laboratory precision.
- # Laboratory and dissection activities must be based on carefully planned objectives. Laboratory and dissection objectives must be appropriate to the maturity level of the student.
- # Student views or beliefs sensitive to dissection must be considered; the teacher will respond appropriately.

National Science Teachers Association
July 1991

National Association of Biology Teachers Position Statement: The Use of Animals in Biology Education

The National Association of Biology Teachers (NABT) believes that the study of whole organisms, including nonhuman animals, is essential to the understanding of life on Earth. NABT recommends the prudent and responsible use of animals in the life science classroom. Furthermore, NABT believes that biology teachers should foster a respect for life; and should teach about the interrelationship and interdependency of all things, and that humans must care for the fragile web of life that exists on this planet.

Classroom experiences that involve nonhuman animals range from observation to dissection. NABT supports these experiences so long as they are conducted within the long-established guidelines of proper care and use of animals, as developed by the scientific community. As with any instructional activity, the use of nonhuman animals in the biology classroom must have sound educational objectives. Any use of animals, whether for observation or dissection, must convey substantive knowledge of biology; and NABT believes that biology teachers are in the best position to make this determination for their students.

NABT acknowledges that no alternative can substitute for the actual experience of dissection and urges teachers to be aware of the limitations of alternatives. When the teacher determines that the most effective means to meet the objectives of the class do not require dissection, NABT supports the use of alternatives to dissection, such as models and videodiscs. The association encourages teachers to be sensitive to substantive student objections to dissection and to consider providing appropriate alternatives for those students.

NABT provides guidelines for the care and use of live animals in classrooms and science fairs. These guidelines are consistent with the tenets of proper care and use of animals and reflect the consensus of the teaching and biomedical research communities.

National Association of Biology Teachers
November 1993

Handwashing Instructions

Washing hands thoroughly and frequently avoids most contagious diseases.

Thoroughly means:

- ! Wet hands with running water
- ! Pump soap into palms
- ! Rub together to make a lather
- ! Scrub hands vigorously for 15 seconds
- ! Rinse soap off of hands
- ! Dry hands

Frequently means:

- ! After going to the toilet
- ! After petting or handling animals
- ! Before eating
- ! Before preparing foods

